

Probies, New Boys, and Names

03/07/07 322 W - + 12 - 16

Speaking of recruits, what would happen to the fire service if every new member were called by their names instead of "probie" or "newbie" or such? Imagine either a memo from the Chief decreeing that Names Shall Be Used or the magic waving of a wand where it has always been such. What would the resulting organization-- fire company, fire department-- look like? Would there be a greater sense of equality out of the starting gate, desired or otherwise? Would teams work more or less efficiently? Would things in general be better, worse, or the same? Moot thought exercise, of course, as this tradition is so thoroughly ingrained. And, honestly, it has met the needs of the service.

The objective of the fire company involves problem-solving in high-stress and high-risk environments. The completion of these highly strenuous tasks requires uniformity in motivation. The "troops" have to be ready and willing to act without a moment's thought. The process to indoctrinate these troops is based on the military and includes such motivational techniques as calling the newest members by nicknames. "Hey Probie!" But it works well, or seems to work well.

(Such a thing could be measured. Identify two organizations, one that uses names and one that uses nicknames. Measure performance indicators over a period of time. Times, outcomes, etc. Compare results. Also measure morale and even attrition. Yeah, yeah, do feelings matter in the fire service? Only if they compel otherwise good people to leave. But we know the answer to that one, don't we? They obviously Didn't Have What it Takes. See also: Egg, Chicken.)

End of thought exercise, except for a question. How does it work with law enforcement? Once out of the academy, are officers called "newbies" or "probies" as well? And treated in kind? Or is a guy (or gal) with a gun a bit higher on the food chain from the get-go?

treating new boys like new boys and calling them probies or new boys is an important part of the fire service it shows them their place and gives another incentive to work hard to become accepted into the family.

Roger - 03/07/07 - 19:10

A common name at RPD for some of the new police officers is "slick sleeve". This meaning the only patch on the sleeve is an RPD patch, versus a "first class", "master officer", etc. patch.

Silver - 03/07/07 - 20:14

Tradition is key to these names. It is tradition in the service to give the probies a hard time, it gives them tough skin for the things we see day to day that would upset normal people. It also makes them work for respect and gives them a sense of accomplishment.

Fd NW - 03/08/07 - 18:15

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